

# SPORTS

SATURDAY, AUGUST 26, 2023 | journalstar.com/sports | SECTION B

## NU ‘ready for anything’ as prep begins



Nebraska's Jeff Sims hands the ball to Gabe Ervin during a practice Aug. 15 at Hawks Championship Center.

Huskers know what to expect; look to stop run

**LUKE MULLIN**  
Lincoln Journal Star

Jeff Sims feels ready. With Nebraska now in its game week preparation, the quarterback said he believes his team “is ready for anything” when it comes to the Huskers’ upcoming matchup at Minnesota. That said, Sims is still going to make use of the five days of preparation he still has to get through before Nebraska hits the field Thursday.

Whether on offense or defense, Nebraska’s players have a good idea of what to expect from Minnesota — and the in-



**FOOTBALL THURSDAY**

Nebraska at Minnesota

7 p.m. **TV:** FOX. **Radio:** 1400, 98.1.

stall is on. For returning veterans such as defensive back Isaac Gifford, last year’s game experience has informed their preparation this time around.

Minnesota’s former offensive coordinator, Kirk Ciarrocca, departed for Rutgers in the off-season, leading head coach PJ Fleck to name assistants Matt Simon and Greg Harbaugh Jr. as co-offensive coordinators. Still, the principles of the Minnesota offense remain the same.

“Everybody knows they like to get downhill, they like to wear their opponents out and they play really hard,” Gifford said.

During Minnesota’s 20-13 road win last season, the Gophers attempted just 20 passes while running the ball 45 times. Even with a new starting running back and several new faces along the offensive line, Minnesota’s offense is still built around running the ball.

Please see **PREPARING**, Page B3

■ **Inside:** Nebraska’s situational awareness has improved; Minnesota chasing defensive “ghosts.” **Page B3**

### HUSKER FOOTBALL

## Nebraska ‘confident’ ahead of opener

‘Tough’ fall camp prepares Huskers for Gophers

**SAM MCKEWON**  
Omaha World-Herald

If the Matt Rhule era works out the way he hopes — the way Nebraska football needs it to work — this first offseason and training camp may be worth a book. Pushing weight sleds in the snow last winter. Rooming in the dorms this summer. Practicing in 100-degree heat just after the start of classes.

“It was the toughest fall camp that I’ve been a part of,” rover Isaac Gifford said.

And it’s over. So is talking season. Nebraska football under Rhule now moves into the evidence phase.

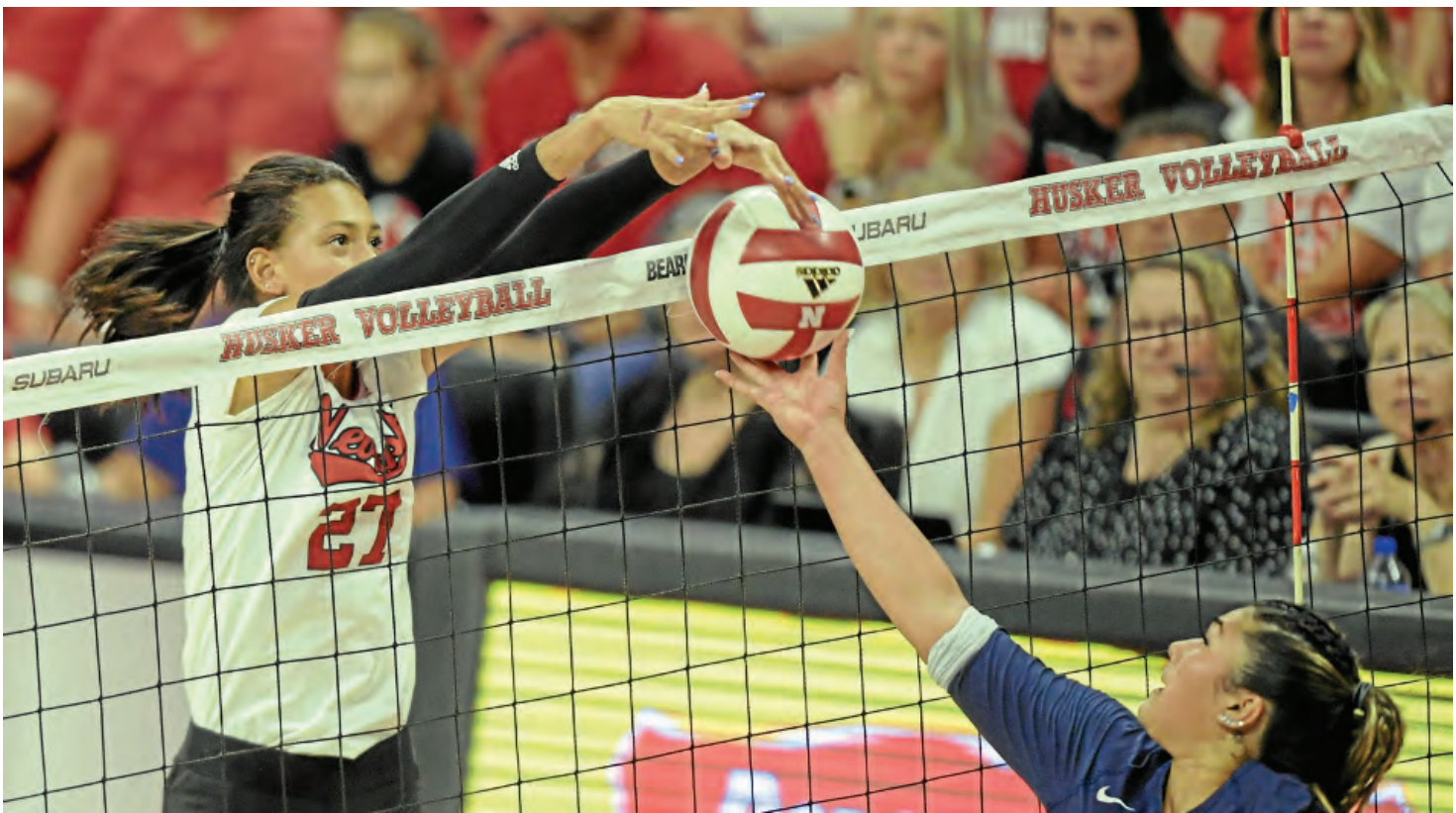
Next week, his team starts its 2023 journey with its toughest opener in years: At Minnesota, which has beaten NU four straight times and is coming off back-to-back nine-win seasons.

“We’ll really find out what kind of team we are — fast,” Gifford said.

No warmup game against a mid-major. No time to work out the kinks. A divisional battle two days before the official weekend kickoff to the season, in a sea of gold.

“We won’t know truly who we are until we play a game and probably a couple games, right?” Rhule said Friday morning, a cup of coffee perched on the podium. “My challenge to them has been, hey, don’t get to game four or game five and have everything all of the sudden slow down and have the light come on. Try to do it now.”

Please see **CONFIDENT**, Page B3



Nebraska freshman Harper Murray (27) leaps at the net against Utah State grad student Shelby Capllonch during a match Friday at the Devaney Sports Center.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS



Nebraska freshman Bergen Reilly (back) hits the ball as Utah State students Jill Schneggenburger (7) and Kennedi Boyd look to block it during a match Friday at the Devaney Sports Center.

Freshmen Murray, Reilly shine as NU takes opener

**BRENT C. WAGNER**  
Lincoln Journal Star

Nebraska volleyball’s lineup for the first match of the season included three freshmen.

The showing by those players — setter Bergen Reilly, outside hitter Harper Murray and defensive specialist Laney Choboy — along with coach John Cook’s comments after the match indicate they’ll keep getting long stretches of play.

In the first match of her college career, Murray had a strong all-around match and some timely plays in helping the Huskers to a three-set win against Utah State on Friday, 25-20, 25-17, 25-17.

Nebraska won the final five points of the match before a crowd of 8,436 at the Devaney Sports Center.

Murray finished with nine kills on a .350 hitting percentage, the



**VOLLEYBALL FRIDAY**

No. 5 Nebraska 3, Utah State 0 (25-20, 25-17, 25-17)

**VOLLEYBALL SATURDAY**

Lipscomb at No. 5 Nebraska

**Radio:** 107.3.

highest of Nebraska’s pin hitters. She also had five blocks and one ace serve.

The Huskers’ other starters were outside hitter Lindsay Krause; right-side hitter Merritt Beason; middle blockers Bekka Allick and Maggie Mendelson; and libero Lexi Rodriguez.

Please see **VOLLEYBALL**, Page B2



**PHOTOS:** To see more photos from the Nebraska’s season-opening win against Utah State, point your smartphone camera at the QR code and tap the link.

**NEWSVU**

### HUSKER FOOTBALL

## Nebraska releases depth chart

A look at notable developments, including kicker

**EVAN BLAND**  
Omaha World-Herald

A month of full camp has culminated in Nebraska’s first depth chart under coach Matt Rhule.

The game-week pecking order — released minutes before Rhule spoke with media members Friday — mostly confirmed what coaches and players said throughout August. Among the notable developments are Tristan Alvano and Timmy Bleekrode listed as the co-No. 1 starting kickers and DeShon Singleton — praised by Rhule on the radio this week — completing his rapid ascent to starting safety

alongside fellow former safety reserve Omar Brown.

Also of note is redshirt freshman running back Emmett Johnson earning the top spot at kickoff returner. Receiver Billy Kemp will return punts.

The starting offensive line (left to right) is Turner Corcoran, Ethan Piper, Ben Scott, Nouri Nouili and Bryce Benhart. Nate Boerkircher is listed as the co-No. 1 tight end along with Thomas Fidone while starting receivers are Alex Bullock and Isaiah Garcia Castaneda. Billy Kemp is listed as the starting slot.

The backup quarterback spot is also a shared spot between Heinrich Haarberg and Chubba Purdy.

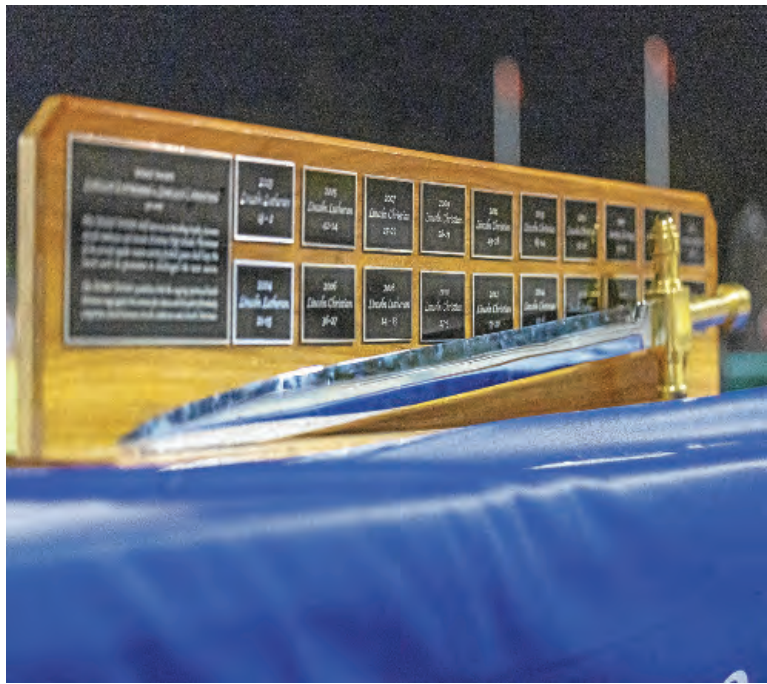
The running back pecking order is Gabe Ervin, Rahmir Johnson, Anthony Grant and Emmett Johnson. Janiran Bonner and Bar-

ret Liebenritt share the top full-back line.

On defense, the No. 1 line is Ty Robinson, Nash Hutmacher and Blaise Gunnerson along with Cam Lenhardt. The co-1 “Jack” backer — a blend of D-line and linebacker — is Chief Borders and MJ Sherman followed by Jimari Butler.

Starting cornerbacks are Malcolm Hartzog and Quinton Newsome — backups are Tommi Hill and Dwight Bootle — with Isaac Gifford and Phalen Sanford the top two at “rover,” a blend of linebacker and defensive back.

**VIEW:** To see reporters Luke Mullin and Wilson Moore break down the depth chart, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**



KENNETH FERRIERA, JOURNAL STAR

### SPIRIT SWORD UP FOR GRABS

Lincoln Christian and Lincoln Lutheran played its annual Spirit Sword rivalry game Friday. Will the Crusaders keep the trophy or will the Warriors take it back? **FULL COVERAGE, B4.**



FAN PLAN		
<b>HUSKER FOOTBALL — TICKETS: 800-8-BIGRED</b>		
Aug. 31	at Minnesota	7 (Fox)
Sept. 9	at Colorado	11 (Fox)
Sept. 16	N. Illinois	6 (FS1)
<b>HUSKER VOLLEYBALL — TICKETS: 800-8-BIGRED</b>		
Saturday	Lipscomb	5
Sunday	SMU	2
Wednesday	UNO	7
<b>LINCOLN SALTDOGS — TICKETS 402-474-2255</b>		
Saturday	at Sioux Falls	5:35
Sunday	at Sioux Falls	2
Tuesday	Cleburne DH	5
AREA EVENTS		
<b>HUSKERS</b>		
Volleyball vs. Lipscomb, 5 p.m., Devaney.		
<b>STATE COLLEGES</b>		
<b>Men's soccer:</b> Concordia vs. Graceland, 5 p.m., Seward.		
<b>Women's soccer:</b> Concordia vs. Graceland, 7:15 p.m., Seward.		
<b>Volleyball:</b> Concordia vs. Midland, 4 p.m., Seward.		
<b>SALTDOGS</b>		
Lincoln at Sioux Falls, 5:30 p.m.		
<b>HIGH SCHOOLS</b>		
<b>Cross country:</b> Lincoln High, Northeast, Northwest, Standing Bear at Norris invite, 9:30 a.m.		
<b>Softball:</b> East, North Star, Northeast, Northwest, Pius X, Southeast, Southwest at East invite, 9 a.m., Doris Bair.		
<b>Boys tennis:</b> Northwest, Standing Bear at Elkhorn invite, 9 a.m.; L. Christian at Grand Island CC invite, 9 a.m.		
<b>Volleyball:</b> East at Bellevue West invite, 9 a.m.; Northeast, Northwest, Southeast at Northeast invite, 9 a.m.; Louisville at Parkview, 1 p.m.; Lutheran at Grand Island Northwest, 3:15 p.m.		
<b>AUTO RACING</b>		
Eagle Raceway, 6:30 p.m.		
TV/RADIO		
<b>AUTO RACING</b>		
6:30 p.m., NASCAR: Coke Zero Sugar 400		TV 6
<b>MLB</b>		
2 p.m., Guardians at Blue Jays		MLB (306)
3 p.m., Royals at Mariners		BSM (37)
3 p.m., Braves at Giants		FS1 (75)
6 p.m., regional coverage		42 (9), 51 (18)
9 p.m., Reds at Diamondbacks		MLB (306)
<b>BIG3 BASKETBALL</b>		
Noon, Playoffs: Enemies vs. Triplets		10/11
<b>BOXING</b>		
9:30 p.m., Top Rank Main Card: Anderson vs. Rudenko		ESPN (34)
<b>COLLEGE FOOTBALL</b>		
1:30 p.m., Navy vs. Notre Dame		6
2:30 p.m., North Alabama vs. Mercer		ESPN (34)
4:30 p.m., UTEP at Jacksonville St.		CBSSN (315)
6 p.m., UMass at New Mexico St., ESPN (34)		
6 p.m., Ohio at San Diego St.		FS1 (75)
6:30 p.m., SC State vs. Jackson St.		8
6:30 p.m., Hawaii at Vanderbilt		SEC (384)
7 p.m., San Jose St. at Southern Cal		PAC12 (375)
8 p.m., FIU at Louisiana Tech		CBSSN (315)
<b>COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL</b>		
2:30 p.m., Creighton at Purdue		BTN (24)
4:30 p.m., Wisconsin vs. TCU		BTN (24)
7 p.m., Baylor at Minnesota		BTN (24)
<b>FIBA BASKETBALL</b>		
7:30 a.m., U.S. vs. New Zealand		ESPN2 (35)
<b>GOLF</b>		
5:30 a.m., DP World: Czech Masters		GLF (39)
Noon, PGA: The Tour Championship		GLF (39)
2 p.m., PGA: The Tour Championship		10/11
2 p.m., PGA: The Ally Challenge		GLF (39)
4 p.m., USGA: Senior Women's Open		GLF (39)
6 p.m., LPGA: CPK Canadian Women's Open		GLF (39)
5 a.m. (Sunday), DP World: Czech Masters		GLF (39)
<b>GYMNASTICS</b>		
6 p.m., USGA: Men's U.S. Championships		CNBC (57)
<b>HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL</b>		
11 a.m., St. Frances (Md.) vs. Chaminade-Madonna (Fla.)		ESPN (34)
3 p.m., St. John Bosco (Calif.) vs. St. Thomas Aquinas (Fla.)		ESPN2 (35)
6 p.m., St. Joseph Prep (Pa.) vs. IMG Academy (Fla.)		ESPN2 (35)
9 p.m., Mater Dei Catholic (Calif.) at Carlsbad (Calif.)		ESPN2 (35)
<b>HORSE RACING</b>		
12:30 p.m., Saratoga		FS1 (75)
2 p.m., Saratoga: Travers Stakes		42 (9), 51 (18)
<b>LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL</b>		
11:30 a.m., LLWS: International Championship		8
2:30 p.m., LLWS: U.S. Championship		8
<b>NFL</b>		
Noon, Browns at Chiefs		NFL (310)
5 p.m., Jets at Giants		NFL (310)
8 p.m., Chargers at Broncos		NFL (310)
<b>INTERNATIONAL MEN'S SOCCER</b>		
6:30 a.m., Rangers at Ross County		CBSSN (315)
6:30 a.m., Tottenham Hotspur at Bournemouth		USA (27)
9 a.m., Fulham at Arsenal		USA (27)
11:30 a.m., West Ham United at Brighton & Hove Albion		6
1:30 p.m., AS Roma at Hellas Verona		CBSSN (315)
10 p.m., Guadalajara at Santos Laguna		FS1 (75)
<b>TRACK AND FIELD</b>		
12:30 p.m., world championships		CNBC (57)
Midnight (Sunday), world championships: men's marathon		CNBC (57)
<b>WNBA BASKETBALL</b>		
6 p.m., Las Vegas at Washington		NBA (308)
NOTE: ( ) reflects channel on Spectrum. Availability depends on level of service.		
<b>MLB</b>		
3 p.m., Royals at Mariners		RADIO 93.7
<b>AMERICAN ASSOCIATION</b>		
5:30 p.m., Lincoln at Sioux Falls		1240, 103.3

## Volleyball

From B1

Reilly had 26 set assists, while also putting down four kills on six attempts. She added seven digs and three blocks.

Reilly earned the right to get the first chance at setter, where the Huskers also have junior Kennedy Orr, Cook said.

“Day after day she’s usually one of our best servers, she’s getting better as a blocker, she sets really good tempo, she sets the middle really well,” Cook said. “Her back-sets are world class. If you really know volleyball, some of her back sets are elite-level. And she’s a great competitor.

“It’s been very close, but over time she’s a couple points better right now.”

Bergen knew a few hours before the match that she’d start.

“(Cook) just kind of said this team has a lot of trust in you, and you’ve given us a reason to trust you, and we have full confidence in you,” Reilly said. “That was his reasoning.”

Beason, also in her first match at Nebraska, had eight kills.

Allick had a strong all-around match with five kills on just eight attempts; seven blocks and one ace serve.

In the first set, Nebraska got rolling during a stretch when Allick and Murray each had blocks.

Murray had the kill on set point with a blast to the middle of the court. Murray was also strong at the end of the second set with a block and a kill for Nebraska’s final two points.

Murray had a solid start, Cook said. She did get aced three times over 21 serve-receive targets, and teams will continue to chal-

lenge her in that way.

“She’s going to get served balls because when you’re out there with Lexi and Laney they’re going to serve (her),” Cook said.

Beason had more hitting errors than Murray but also wowed the crowd a few times with kills on back-row attacks.

“She’s got it down,” Reilly said. “She’s hard to stop when we get that connection. We’re going to keep working on that and keep trying to master that, and it will be hard to stop.”

Outside hitter Shelby Capllonch had nine kills for Utah State. Nebraska had a .286 hitting percentage and limited the Aggies to .061.

Nebraska plays Lipscomb (0-1) at 5 p.m. on Saturday.

With three matches over three days to start the season, Nebraska will probably work in a few more players this weekend, including another freshman in middle

blocker Andi Jackson.

“We just kind of told them that this is the group that was going to lead our stampede tonight,” Cook said. “We’re a herd of horses stampeding toward this season, and this was the group that was going to lead the stampede tonight. We’ll mix it up a little (Saturday).”

In the first match of the Ameritas Players Challenge, SMU beat Lipscomb in three sets, 25-17, 25-16, 25-21.

NO. 5 NEBRASKA 3, UTAH STATE 0				
Utah State	20	17	17	
Nebraska	25	25	25	
<b>Utah State (Kills-blocks-service aces)</b> —Capllonch (9-1-1), Mehmedovic (6-1-0), Schlegelburger (5-2-0), Ray (4-2-0), Boyd (3-3-0), Wooden (2-3-0), Rodrigues (1-0-1), Holdaway (0-0-0), Hone (0-0-3), Witton-Laboy (0-0-0), Watson (0-0-0). <b>Totals 30-6-5.</b>				
<b>Nebraska</b> —Beason (9-2-0), Murray (9-5-1), Krause (6-0-2), Allick (5-7-1), Reilly (4-3-0), Mendelson (3-3-0), Choboy (0-0-0), Rodriguez (0-0-0). <b>Totals 36-11-4.</b>				
<b>Assists</b> —Utah State:20 (Hone, 13), Nebraska:33 (Reilly, 26). <b>Digs</b> —Utah State:28 (Holdaway, 8), Nebraska:31 (Rodriguez, 9). <b>Hitting percentage</b> —Utah State:.061, Nebraska:.286. <b>T</b> —1-30. <b>A</b> —8,436.				

Reach the writer at 402-473-7435 or bwagner@journalstar.com. On Twitter @LJSSportsWagner.

HIGH SCHOOLS	
<b>Volleyball</b>	
<b>CITY SCHOOLS</b>	
<b>BELLEVUE WEST TOURNAMENT</b>	
Elkhorn North def. Bellevue West, 25-14, 22-25, 25-20	
Elkhorn South vs. Bellevue West	
Elkhorn North def. Elkhorn South, 25-17, 21-15	
Elkhorn South vs. Omaha Westside	
Lincoln East vs. Gretna	
Lincoln East vs. Millard West	
Millard South at Bellevue West	
Millard West at Millard North	
Omaha Skutt def. Gretna, 25-21, 25-20	
Omaha Skutt def. Millard West, 25-22, 25-19	
Omaha Skutt def. Papillion-La Vista, 25-16, 25-19	
Papillion-La Vista South def. Omaha Marian, 25-14, 25-16	
Western Christian (La.) def. Omaha Marian, 25-21, 25-23	
<b>OTHER SCHOOLS</b>	
Bertrand def. Sandhills/Theftord, 26-24, 25-17, 17-25, 25-21	
Deshler def. Giltner, 25-23, 25-18, 25-85	
Medicine Valley def. Mullen, 25-22, 25-23, 25-18	
Omaha Benson def. Omaha Bryan, 25-22, 21-25, 25-20	
Omaha Northwest def. Omaha Bryan, 25-11, 25-16	
Omaha Northwest def. Omaha Benson, 25-10, 25-13	
Sioux County def. Creek Valley, 25-19, 25-15, 25-18	
Southern Valley def. Sandhills Valley, 25-18, 25-10, 25-14	
<b>DOUGLAS INVITATIONAL</b>	
Alliance def. Douglass (Wyo.), 24-26, 25-19, 15-9	
Alliance def. Moorcroft (Wyo.), 25-14, 25-9	
<b>Softball</b>	
<b>CITY SCHOOLS</b>	
Norfolk 11, Lincoln Northeast 0	
<b>OTHER SCHOOLS</b>	
Alliance 12, Southern Valley/Alma 2	
Blue Springs 2, Papillion-La Vista 0	
Gothenburg 3, Alliance 0	
Gretna 3, Blue Springs South 2	
<b>Cross country</b>	
<b>AUBURN INVITE</b>	
<b>BOYS TEAM SCORING:</b> Plattview, 30; Cornerstone Christian, 36; Falls City, 51; Louisville, 59; Johnson CC, 92; Sidney (Iowa), 95; Auburn, 108.	
<b>BOYS TOP FINISHERS:</b> 1. Raszler, Plattview, 17:15.12; 2. Kohl, Plattview, 17:40.06; 3. Zimmerman, Falls City, 18:13.86; 4. Jarosik, Sandy Creek, 18:59.22; 5. McCullough, Falls City, 19:01.89; 6. Aue, Auburn, 19:09.84; 7. Milner, Cornerstone Christian, 19:10.03; 8. Topog, Johnson CC, 19:14.32; 9. Barnes, Louisville, 19:17.19; 10. Whalen, Cornerstone Christian, 19:26.92.	
<b>GIRLS TEAM SCORING:</b> Auburn, 14; Plattview 26.	
<b>GIRLS TOP FINISHERS:</b> 1. Crotty, Auburn, 20:58.00; 2. Billings, Auburn, 21:29.25; 3. Stewart, Plattview, 22:00.58; 4. Kermoads, Plattview, 22:02.07; 5. Becker, Auburn, 22:36.58; 6. Thomas, Auburn, 22:59.63; 7. Jones, Auburn, 23:05.40; 8. Thomas, Auburn, 23:48.02; 9. Hike, Cornerstone Christian, 23:56.23; 10. Lawrence, Plattview, 24:17.08.	
<b>VINCE ZAVALA INVITATIONAL</b>	
<b>BOYS TOP FINISHERS:</b> 1. Boltz, Grand Island, 13:20.31; 2. Caceres Perez, Grand Island; 13:29.39; 3. Smith, Grand Island Northwest, 13:44.35; 4. Gautier, Aurora, 14:00.20; 5. Cederburg, Minden, 14:14.46; 6. Evans, Aurora, 14:22.54; 7. Hartford, Grand Island, 14:26.33; 8. Daugherty, Aurora, 14:45.26; 9. Sheffield, Grand Island Northwest, 14:50.26; 10. Mendoza, Grand Island Northwest, 14:58.01.	
<b>GIRLS TOP FINISHERS:</b> 1. Johnson, Grand Island, 17:49.51; 2. Chapman, Grand Island Northwest, 17:30.38; 3. Ericksen, Aurora, 17:37.95; 4. Wineteer, Aurora, 17:39.78; 5. Schlachter, Grand Island, 18:00.80; 6. Warford, Wahon, 18:08.63; 7. Eggleston, Aurora, 18:09.11; 8. Badstieber, Columbus Lakeview, 18:14.09; 9. Morris, Grand Island, 18:14.35; 10. Slagle, Aurora, 18:21.67.	

BASEBALL	
<b>Triple-A</b>	
<b>International League</b>	
<b>Second half (x-first half winner)</b>	
	<b>W L Pct. GB</b>
Lehigh Valley (Phila.)	29 19 .604 —
Worcester (Boston)	29 19 .604 —
Durham (Tampa Bay)	29 20 .592 ½
St. Paul (Minnesota)	29 20 .592 ½
Nashville (Milwaukee)	28 20 .583 1
Buffalo (Toronto)	26 21 .553 2½
Scranton/WB (NYY)	26 21 .553 2½
Jacksonville (Miami)	27 22 .551 2½
x-Norfolk (Baltimore)	27 22 .551 2½
Iowa (Chicago Cubs)	26 22 .542 3
Indianapolis (Pitt.)	25 23 .521 4
Louisville (Cincinnati)	25 23 .521 4
Toledo (Detroit)	23 25 .479 6
Columbus (Cleveland)	22 25 .468 6½
Gwinnett (Atlanta)	22 25 .468 6½
Rochester (Wash.)	22 26 .458 7
Memphis (St. Louis)	21 27 .438 8
Syracuse (N.Y. Mets)	18 29 .383 10½
Omaha (Kansas City)	15 32 .319 13½
Charlotte (CWS)	10 38 .208 19
<b>Thursday's results</b>	
Durham 3, Norfolk 1	
Worcester 4, Rochester 3	
Jacksonville 8, Columbus 4	
Louisville 6, Toledo 5	
Indianapolis 10, Iowa 9	
Nashville 3, Gwinnett 2	
Charlotte 12, Memphis 9	
St. Paul 10, Omaha 7	
Buffalo 9, Syracuse 4	
Lehigh Valley at Scranton/WB, p.p.d.	
<b>Friday's results</b>	
Norfolk 12, Durham 9	
Scranton/WB 6, Lehigh Valley 5	
Rochester 6, Worcester 5	
Indianapolis 2, Iowa 1	
Nashville 7, Gwinnett 3	

American Association	
<b>EAST DIVISION</b>	
	<b>W L PCT. GB</b>
Milwaukee	52 39 .571 —
Chicago	50 40 .556 1½
Kane County	45 45 .500 6
Cleburne	43 47 .478 8½
Lake Country	43 48 .473 9
Gary Southshore	37 54 .411 14½
<b>WEST DIVISION</b>	
	<b>W L PCT. GB</b>
Kansas City	53 36 .596 —
Sioux City	47 43 .522 6½
Sioux Falls	47 45 .511 7½
Fargo-Moorhead	44 47 .484 10
Lincoln	42 49 .461 12
Winnipeg	40 51 .440 14
<b>Thursday's results</b>	
Winnipeg 7, Sioux Falls 5	
Chicago 5, Lake Country 1	
Fargo-Moorhead 6, Gary Southshore 4	
Cleburne 2, Kane County 1	
Kansas 7, Lincoln 3	
Sioux City 4, Milwaukee 0	
<b>Friday's results</b>	
Kansas City at Winnipeg, late	
Milwaukee 10, Lake Country 5	
Chicago 5, Gary Southshore 2	
Fargo-Moorhead 13, Sioux City 1	
Sioux Falls 7, Lincoln 3	
Kane County at Cleburne, late	
<b>Saturday's games</b>	
Chicago at Gary Southshore, 4 p.m.	
Lincoln at Sioux Falls, 5:35 p.m.	
Kansas City at Winnipeg, 6 p.m.	
Fargo-Moorhead, 6 p.m.	
Milwaukee at Lake Country, 6 p.m.	
Kane County at Cleburne, 7 p.m.	
<b>Kansas City 7, Lincoln 3</b>	
<b>From Thursday</b>	
	<b>ab r h bi so avg</b>
Kansas City	4 1 0 0 0 .301
Herrera cf	5 1 2 1 0 .317
Wylie 2b	4 1 0 0 .358
Herrmann dh	4 3 2 3 .309
Adolfo rf	5 0 1 1 .245
O'Grady lf	3 1 3 2 .294
Snyder 1b	4 0 0 1 0 .143
Yerzy c	4 0 0 0 0 .211
Cannon 3b	4 0 0 0 0 .243
Hatch ss	4 0 1 0 0 .249
Totals	37 7 10 7
Lincoln	ab r h bi so avg
Anderson cf	5 0 0 0 0 .272
Panas rf	5 0 1 1 .276
Rogers 1b	3 0 0 0 0 .313
Roskam c	4 1 2 1 .309
Perez dh	4 0 0 0 0 .312
Takacs lf	5 0 3 0 .249
Samson 2b	4 0 0 0 0 .259
Roman 3b	3 2 2 1 .262
Devine ss	2 0 2 0 0 .281
Totals	35 3 10 3
Kansas City	402 000 001 — 7 10 1
Lincoln	000 001 110 — 3 10 1
<b>E</b> —Wylie (14), Roman (2). <b>LOB</b> —KC 7, Lincoln 13. <b>DP</b> —1, 3. <b>2B</b> —Wylie (19), Adolfo (21), O'Grady (11), Snyder (3), Takacs 2 (21), Devine (22). <b>HR</b> —Adolfo (12), Snyder (3), Roskam (13), Roman (3). <b>SB</b> —Wylie (16), Herrmann (2).	
<b>Kansas City</b>	
Miller (W, 10-2)	5.0 4 0 0 5 3 3.64
Cobb	1.0 2 1 1 1 1 6.23
Correa	1.0 2 1 1 1 1 9.00
Rossman	1.0 1 1 1 1 0 1.35
Weigel	1.0 1 0 0 0 1 1.35
Lincoln	ip h r er bb so era
Brown (L, 4-7)	0.0 3 4 4 3 0 5.86
Bezdek c	6.0 5 2 2 1 6 5.56
Borkovich	2.0 1 0 0 0 2 2.89
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<b>T</b> —3:09. <b>A</b> —1747.	
<b>Little League World Series</b>	
<b>At Williamsport, Pa.</b>	
<b>Thursday's results</b>	
Willemstad (Curaçao) 4, Tijuana (Mexico) 2	
El Segundo (Calif.) 2, Seattle (Wash.) 1	
<b>Saturday's games</b>	



Preparing

From B1

For junior Ty Robinson, that’s hardly been a surprise during film study. Robinson and Nebraska’s other defensive linemen know they have a key role to play against the Gophers, particularly when it comes to getting the Husker defense off the field.

In Minnesota’s 2020 win, it held the ball for 11 more minutes than the Huskers did; in 2021, it was a 16-minute margin in Minnesota’s favor followed by an 11-minute difference last season. No matter how you slice it, Minnesota knows how to keep the ball — and the Huskers want to keep them from controlling the clock at all costs.

“Minnesota is going to run the ball, that’s not a shocker to anybody,” Robinson said. “They’ve got big guys up front, our big guys up front are going to take them on and it’s going to be a battle all day. We know that they’re going to try and run the clock out because they’re a running team. ... Our plan is to stop the run and get them to pass and see what we can do.”

If Nebraska can force to Minnesota to pass, it’ll get a steady dose of sophomore quarterback Athan Kaliakmanis. An untested young quarterback during that point in the 2022 season, Kaliakmanis entered the contest mid-game and helped Minnesota turn a 10-0 deficit into a 20-10 second-half lead.

Linebacker Luke Reimer made nine tackles in that loss and remembers Kaliakmanis’ heroics well. He’s hoping to keep them in check this time around.

“He fits into their system, he’s not making mistakes and they’re not throwing the ball all over the place,” Reimer said of Kaliakmanis. “They know what they do — they run inside zone and stretches; they’re a hard-nosed, physical team and he fits that scheme extremely well.”

It’s not just the Minnesota offense that Nebraska knows what to expect from. The Gophers have possessed one of the nation’s best scoring defenses for several seasons now, a testament to defensive coordinator Joe Rossi’s consistency. Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule said Friday that he knows Rossi “from way back at Rutgers” and complimented how the longtime defensive coach has been able to evolve his defense from season to season.

“A lot of times, you face a team like this and you don’t really understand their defense,” Rhule said. “They do such a great job, they play team defense and everything is funneled to certain players. Everything is put together.”

To break down the Minnesota defense, offensive lineman Ben Scott said Nebraska’s game plan “starts with the offensive line.” Scott was careful not to give away more details than that because, unlike Nebraska, Minnesota has limited game film to prepare on.

What does a Sims-led offense with run-pass options look like? Minnesota doesn’t know yet. Or, what about NU’s 3-3-5 defense where players swap roles and line up in new places? There are some twists the Gophers won’t expect.

And while Minnesota will be planning its own changes, the Huskers remain confident that they have a good idea of what to expect out of the Gophers on Thursday.

Now, it’s all about turning expectations into on-field execution.

“They know what they do (and) they do it at an extremely high level, so it’s going to be a big challenge for us,” Reimer said. “We’re up for it, we’re excited and we’re not making excuses.”

RED REPORT



JUSTIN WAN, JOURNAL STAR FILE PHOTO

Nebraska’s Corey Collier runs after a ball-carrier during practice earlier this month at Hawks Championship Center.

# Raising awareness

Rhule: Players have improved in reading in-game situations

LUKE MULLIN  
Lincoln Journal Star

Nebraska head coach Matt Rhule knew it without any hesitation.

Asked on Friday to identify one area where his Huskers have made the biggest jump in recent months, Rhule immediately identified situational awareness. During film study, Rhule has shown games as far back as 2000 and as recent as last year to get Nebraska’s players familiar with every single type of end-of-game situation they could possibly encounter.

“When I first started, I’d say, ‘What are you guys hearing?’ and I’d have like three guys,” Rhule said. “Now there’s a chorus of guys that understand what’s happening, the situation and what should happen. I’d say our situational awareness has really jumped up.”

This learning has taken place during practice too. Nebraska’s situational work involves Rhule telling two team leaders about the scenario he wants them to practice, then relying on those two players to communicate with their

teammates and make sure everyone is on the same page. This practice work looks much different in August than it did in March, Rhule said.

“I couldn’t have done that in the spring as well, but right now I’d say that to the guys and they’re locked into the situation,” Rhule said. “Now, will that carry over to the game? I don’t know.”

Buford could redshirt

Junior defensive back Marques Buford remains several weeks away from a potential return to the field, Rhule said. Considering the season-ending knee injury Buford suffered last November was the second major injury of his career, Rhule said the Nebraska coaching staff sat down with Buford’s family several months ago to lay out the lengthy rehabilitation process.

Buford wore a yellow non-participant jersey throughout the first few weeks of fall camp, but that could change soon. Rhule said that according to team doctors, Buford had “a significant jump” in the last week and will hopefully progress to on-field work soon.

“I wouldn’t look for him any time soon on the field; I think it’s

more of maybe Week 5, maybe Week 6,” Rhule said. “If not, maybe it’s the last four games of the year and then he redshirts this year and plays for two years. Either way, there’s a big difference between letting guys come back when they can come back and when they should come back.”

Freshman RB earns kick-return nod

As so many do, Emmett Johnson’s college career began quietly. A three-star running back recruit from Minneapolis, his first action at Nebraska came in the form of four games on special teams, taking a redshirt year in 2022.

The Huskers’ backfield is just as crowded as it was a year ago with Gabe Ervin Jr., Rahmir Johnson and Anthony Grant all likely to see action. Emmett Johnson remains one of the low men on the totem pole, but he’s taken incremental steps toward more extended playing time.

Rhule likes Johnson’s versatility, and it showed on the Huskers’ first depth chart of the season. The redshirt freshman is NU’s starting kick returner, beating out Rahmir Johnson. He’ll make his positional debut in his hometown

when Nebraska plays Minnesota.

“Emmett has made some tremendous strides from being a freshman to where he is now,” Ervin said. “He’s really taken to coaching, coach E.J., (running backs coach E.J. Barthel) what he’s trying to display to him, and he’s taking it to heart. Coach E.J.’s being hard on Emmett for a reason, because we might need Emmett this year. It’s a long season, you don’t know what’s going to happen, but he’s taken every coaching ability as he can, but he’s definitely becoming that veteran later on.”

Big Ten reveals player availability notice policy

The Big Ten will require its football programs to release player availability reports two hours before each conference game’s kickoff. The rule, in part, represents another step closer in the relationship between gambling and college football.

Asked Friday about team injuries, Minnesota coach P.J. Fleck said the Gophers are a “pretty healthy team” and that he wouldn’t go into detail until perhaps around 5 p.m. Thursday.

# Minnesota chasing defensive ‘ghosts’

Gophers first to see NU’s new-look ‘D’

EVAN BLAND  
Omaha World-Herald

The mystery of Nebraska’s new defense has P.J. Fleck and Minnesota — to borrow an in-house term — chasing ghosts.

Such is the plight of the Gophers as the first team to face defensive coordinator Tony White and his 3-3-5 scheme with the Huskers. It’s an attack that can show one front before the snap and shift to another within a play, generate blitzes from surprise places and

cause plenty of confusion.

“It creates a lot of issues,” Fleck said Friday. “We were just up there as an offensive staff talking about it.”

An absence of game film adds to the challenge. Minnesota staffers can look at previous years — in the case of White, starting with his last three seasons as DC at Syracuse — and still not be totally sure what’s coming.

Fleck used himself as an example. The offense the NFL’s Tampa Bay Buccaneers ran when he was receivers coach there in 2012 wasn’t anything like what he used as head coach at Western Michi-

gan the following year.

“Sometimes, people change wholeheartedly and philosophically as you keep going through, but they’re very talented,” Fleck said of Nebraska. “They’re big. They’re strong. A lot of guys have played a lot of years for them. They are a very experienced team. And then they’ve added a lot of players from the transfer portal that have played a lot of football elsewhere.”

Minnesota prepares with new co-offensive coordinators in Matt Simon — now calling plays as receivers coach — and Greg Harbaugh Jr., who transitions from

tight ends to quarterbacks coach. Fleck said the Gophers will keep the same philosophical beliefs that helped them win at least nine games in each of the past three full seasons.

“I believe in how you win football games,” Fleck said. “You’ve got to be able to control the ball and you got to take care of the ball. You still have to be able to run the football. You got to play great defense. You got to be able to win situational football. And I’ve said that for years, right? And you really get what you emphasize. And those are things that we hit home constantly.”

Confident

From B1

And he kind of loves the whole road routine, especially that inevitable moment when opposing stadium personnel ask to see his field pass. Those experiences may bring the team closer in late August/early September.

But things can be “messy,” Rhule said, in the first game. It can be messy in the first season of a new head coach, too. NU conducted Thursday night a simulated game — full of situational decisions and physicality — to address any operational concerns in any of the three phases.

Rhule has a pretty good idea of where his coaches will be on gameday, with all three coordina-

tors on the field and several position assistants in the booth. And Rhule believes, over the past nine months, the program has built an identity that will carry over to the season opener.

“I’m confident that we’re going to play hard,” he said. “I’m confident that we’re going to be a physical team. I’m confident that, if things don’t go well early, we’re not going to panic. I’m confident that, if things do go well early, we’re not going to celebrate. I think our guys understand that this is a 60-minute game, and this is a 12-game season.”

That last piece is crucial for a Husker program that has lost tons of second-half leads over the past six years, enough that Rhule, at one point Friday, said he no longer desired to talk about the

past struggles. At some point — he doesn’t know when — Nebraska will play its best in fourth quarters. The team has prepared not to outscore teams 14-0 in the opening 15 minutes, but to outscore foes by that margin in the final 15 minutes.

“How we practice — and how hard we go in practice — is definitely different,” Nebraska quarterback Jeff Sims said. “There’s a different focus on the details — on the little details — and I think the way we practice is helping us get ready for games and helping us prepare our minds mentally. To develop that mindset that we’re not going to be beat on the toughness scale.”

Rhule’s approach is designed to physically harden the players, but he also dedicated practice sessions to improving their football IQ.

He had the team watch the ends of games — NU’s 2000 win over Colorado, last year’s Purdue-Syracuse thriller — to better understand what works at the ends of contests. At the beginning of his tenure, when Rhule asked how to handle situations, perhaps only a few players raised their hands to answer. A lot more raised their hands now.

And it leads him to believe his team is as ready as it should be. There are no certainties in a program that hasn’t won a season opener since 2019, but Rhule thinks he can have “fun” with these Huskers.

They’ve logged enough hours in preparation, that’s for sure.

“Knowing I’ve done my job 5,000 times gives me a lot of confidence,” Gifford said.